

THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLITICAL PARLIAMENTARY ELITES FROM ROMANIA ON SOME CHANGES OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM BY THE INTRODUCING OF THE QUOTA FOR WOMEN

Dr. Marcela Monica STOICA

"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. The Romanian tradition and ethos regarding the involvement and participation of women in political and public life is quite conservative and after 1990, some small steps ahead were made due to the negotiations for the accession in the euro-Atlantic structures such as European Union, the Council of Europe, NATO, etc

In achievements of these goals, of democratic representation, the Romanian Constitution enshrined the principle of gender equality and non discrimination, but women are still underrepresented in the Parliament of Romania.

This study is a part of a greater research on the political parliamentary elites and the change of the electoral system. The hypothesis is that the change of the electoral system does not change the quality of the political elites but the introducing of the quota for women could be a solution for the increasing of female parliamentary elites. Therefore, this paper aims at analyzing the perceptions on the phenomenon of quota by measuring, using specific questionnaires, two groups of populations: male and female parliamentary elites elected in the actual legislation (2012-2016). Because there is a Special Committee for the New Electoral Code, for the future elections in 2016, we infer that quota might be a solution only if the male and female parliamentary elites succeed in building consensual elite.

Keywords: gender, discrimination; representation; participation; quota; political parliamentary elites.

1. The Romanian tradition in searching the civic culture. From patriarchal culture to dependent one

In the past century, in Romania, the feminine gender was subjected to the male gender and the assets of women, according to the article 199 from Civil Code (second part of the 19th century) couldn't be estranged without the husband's approval. Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Marxist-Leninist-oriented governments of the Eastern European countries had high female representation in the national parliaments. For example, in the late 1980s, on average 33% of the national deputies were women. Unfortunately, requests for equality and quota systems that gave women considerable numerical representation

were strictly for symbolic purposes. An eloquent example in this respect is the model of Elena Ceausescu, the wife of the former communist dictator till 1989.

Much more, on this historical background, in the new regime of building democracy, the gender quotas are rejected in the name of traditions that respect the Christian values and the “natural” differences between men and women. In the same time, these claims are categorized in three positions: being Marxist, neo-communist and feminist, so we could remark that they are still blamed in the post communist public and political space.

In Romania, the lack of involvement and participation of the citizens, in the public sphere, generally, and of the women, specially, are due to the recent past and to the way in which the former communist regime approached this aspect: the communist party’s propaganda regarding the equality between women and men, the introducing of the minimum representative gender quota in the political bodies. All these led to a demonetization and delegitimization of the issue (Băluță, 2012:94).

That’s why, the debates on gender equality and the increase of the women political representation face some prejudices and stereotypes coming from the past, the traditional social representation on the roles of men and women being spread and accepted at the social level.

2. Techniques and methods

This research is explorative through a diachronic and synchronic perspective, so it will not offer an exhaustive solution on this phenomenon. We used a quantitative evaluation of women’s presence in the Romanian post communist parliament. Also, we used the results of the previous researches when we collected empirical data based on questionnaires. Therefore, we try to find out the reasons that led to the rejection of the legislative proposals to introduce gender quotas in various political and social processes.

The paper is organized as follows: a focus is given on the conceptualization of gender and gender empowerment. The paper is based on secondary data of various sources of European and international bodies, reports and literatures of studies conducted worldwide. Another set of data is from the official site of the Chamber of Deputies.

The sociological investigation made in the Romanian Parliament, at the Chamber of Deputies, at two different times showed the opposite: vote *per se* does not alter the structure of parliamentary élites, does not produce better élites and thus does not increase the quality of democracy. The purpose of sociological survey was to measure the perceptions of the parliamentary élites upon some certain issues and, especially, on the electoral process, women’s representation, on the „uninominal” vote, and the way it was expected to enhance the quality of democracy and its effects in the consolidating of democracy (Stoica, 2011: 868).

These results are part from a greater research that took place at the Chamber of Deputies in two different chronological and political moments¹. The first chronological moment was in October 2008 and the second was in November 2009. The political moments are given by the presence of two different types of electoral systems. In the first research, the political élites analyzed belonged to a parliament elected by a proportional representation system on closed lists, and in the second, the elections took place by „uninominal” system. The methods of investigation are case study and comparative analysis of the data based on the research (Stoica, 2013). This is why in our questionnaires we projected the design of questions able to produce information about what élites believe and what are their perceptions. Then, the paper concludes and makes recommendations for future research.

3. Conceptualization on gender, gender quotas typology, political empowerment of women

Approaching this field we found a very rich literature both in Romanian and foreign authors. Further, we try to define the main concept related with this issue. Gender is a set of characteristics that are seen to distinguish between male and female entities that are socially and culturally constructed. Or according to the Report of European Institute for Gender Equality (2014:15), gender refers to women’s and men’s position in society, their social identity, which is shape through history of social relations and can be changed.

Political empowerment refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. Gender gap refers to inequality in opportunities and participation of men and women in development.

Equality and gender relationship are relevant indicators for the degree of development of a society and, in reverse, gender inequality is consider a major barrier in the modernization and democratization of a society. Gradually, it has been accepted that women are the target of discrimination, that social stereotypes focused on them have numerous negatives consequences on their personal, family and professional lives.

In order to ensure this vital gender balance we have to find tools to eliminate the causes that generate imbalance. If it is about discrimination, lack of regulation, disinterest of the political parties and authorities, then we can intervene by public policies. The level of women’s involvement in elections reflects the mentality, the cultural level and the state of mind of a people. A strong argument was launched by the resident representative of PNUD in Romania, Yesmin Oruc, who stated that with the help of women, the political parties could win and change the perception on the politics (Oruc, 2010).

¹ Two questionnaires were applied to the population of deputies, belonging to the legislature 2004 -2008 and 2008 - 2012, and two types of groupings were built. The first grouping included 57 deputies and the second one 62. For the two groupings we used a simple, random and crossed procedure on layers. In 2016, we conducted a survey by using a telephonic questionnaire on 51 deputies.

Taking into consideration the Romanian traditional particularities described above, in this matter, Romania is no exception from the European pattern, being under the average regarding the women's involvement (Patru, 2014:3).

Today, quotas exist in more than one hundred countries around the world, but more than three-quarters of these measures have been passed within the last fifteen years.

The adoption and implementation of quotas highlights the recruitment practices of political elites, indicating that political actors are the central factor producing and mitigating inequalities in representation. The growing literature on gender quotas presents a variety of typologies for classifying different kinds of quota measures. Special measures include reserved seats, constitutionally mandated quotas, electoral law quotas, and political party quotas and targets aimed at increasing the proportion of women among political candidates and representatives.

Candidate gender quotas have, in fact, taken on a variety of different forms across countries in every major region worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2003). Candidate gender quotas, thus, have now been adopted by numerous political parties and national legislatures around the world.

Krook is making an analysis on increasing the women's participation. The most common reforms, from a global perspective, have been provisions for the increased representation of women. Most of these provisions take the form of quota policies aimed at increasing the selection and election of female candidates to political office. The origins of many of these policies can be traced back to the United Nations' (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. The resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed unanimously by all 189 member states, called on governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access and full participation in power structures and decision-making, as well as to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership (United Nations 1995) so the importance of this event can be seen in patterns of quota adoption around the world (Krook, 2009: 3).

By one account, at least 103 countries today have experienced the proposal, the adoption, or the repeal of candidate gender quotas to increase the number of women in parliament, with the majority of these quotas being proposed after 1995 (Global Database of Quotas for Women).

4. Quality of Elites in Romania in respect with the electoral systems

The recent democracies of central and Eastern Europe have fragile political systems, consisting of traditional parties (those that existed in the interwar period and were outlawed by the communists) and new parties (which claim to represent interests of certain social groups who need political representation in order to promote their rights and interests).

Also, another element of a functional democracy is the quality of political parliamentary élites that are the product of electoral system. Thus, the question that arises and we are trying to answer, is whether the change the electoral system in Romania leads

to more efficient élites that contribute in improving the quality of democracy and its consolidation. From the multitude of elements that measure the degree of functionality of a democracy we will stop, below, at the electoral process.

In Romania, the institutional changing of the electoral system was necessary in order to change the structure of the parliamentary élites. A diachronic analysis of the results in the post communist legislatures regarding the presence of women in the parliament indicates us the data presented in table 1. As we can see, in the first three legislatures after the 90's there was a low representation of women and there appeared "a ceiling" around an average of 10%.

Table 1. The representation of women in the Romanian Parliament

Legislature	Mandate won by women (%)	The type of electoral system
1990-1992	4,9 %	Proportional representation (PR)
1992-1996	3,7%	Proportional representation (PR)
1996-2000	4,7%	Proportional representation (PR)
2000-2004	10,8%	Proportional representation (PR)
2004-2008	10,2%	Proportional representation (PR)
2008-2012	9,8%	The system of "uninominal" vote (single constituency) and PR
2012-2016	11%	The system of "uninominal" vote (single constituency) and PR

(Source: www.cdep.ro)

In terms of social representations, the "uninominal" vote system was invested in the Romanian society, with a central quality: it is a much more direct link established between electors and elected, reducing the distance between them. This is the reason for its introduction was seen as a panacea to the crisis of social representativeness of the political class. On the same time, more women were expected to be elected in the uninominal system.

This social perception was based on the belief that individual choice will lead to an increased quality of Romanian Parliament's elected members and to their responsibility to voters, and the great stake was that changing the electoral system could generated a better democracy.

Table 2. Which of the following statements you agree?

Legislature	2004- 2008	2008 - 2012	2012- 2016	
The uninominal system promotes worse deputies	54%	<u>77%</u>	79%	↗
The uninominal system promotes better deputies	<u>46%</u>	23%	21%	↘

As we can remark in the Table 2, (one of the question used in the above mention researches), the answers indicate that the majority of deputies disregard the effectiveness of the uninominal system. These results could be an argument for the Electoral Code Committee that decided that the election for the next legislature (2016- 2019) to be organized again in the proportional representation system (reached to a consensus) and rejected all the parliamentary initiatives for gender quotas also as a result of a political consensus). The researches for determining the MPs perceptions on gender quotas are ongoing and highlight that women’s representation will be higher under a more proportional electoral system than under a uninominal vote. Some of the data suggest that the return to PR is favor of women, the solution being the consensus of political elites.

To sum up, we can say that there is a direct proportional relationship between the functioning of a party system and an electoral system in a democracy and the efficiency of that democracy and of democratic consolidation.

In the majoritarian democracy, the people are governing for its own interest because the governing is done by the majority according to its will. The consensualist democracy involves broad participation in government and as widely agrees on policies that the government should follow (Lijphart, 2000: 26).

The majority government rule is exclusive, competitive and antagonistic, while the model of consensualism is characterized by inclusiveness, consensus, negotiation and compromise. For this reason, democracy of consensual can be called "negotiation democracy” and more democratic than the democracy of majority (Lijphart, 2000: 39).

The concept of citizenship is central to the analysis made by Schmitter and Lynn because only the presence of this concept makes a political system to be democratic or not (Philippe Schmitter, Terry Lynn Karl, 1991:77) and as the author showed, citizenship itself is a product of contemporary democracies, because over time, most political restrictions were made to citizenship (by gender, social class, income, religion, race, etc).

Cooperation among citizens in order to aggregate interests, to join civic and make them available to those who represent the formal institutions and therefore, representativeness is the feature offering the unique character to democracies (Philippe Schmitter, Terry Lynn Karl, 1991:79). The body of representatives is composed of professional politicians who make political decisions making a job, a profession.

No modern democracy can survive without such politicians and the central issue arising from this situation is not whether an elite is professional or not, but how is chosen, and especially how can such an elite to be held responsible for decisions making while is in power. Considering this, the presence of professional elites makes a modern democracy.

The consensual democracy is not a specific institutional framework but a common effort of elites to deliberately create a stable and functional system (Weiler, 2009:130).

5. A chronological overview on the gender quota in Romania. Reducing Inequity via Gender Quotas

All the researches indicate that women are still underrepresented. For instance, according to the last published OSCE results, in the OSCE region the proportion of women representatives in the lower chamber is 24,4%. Therefore, more and more countries introduce legal means to increase legal participation in politics like quotas, equal shares or similar rules (Cinca, David, 2015:47).

Many arguments for gender quotas, in Romania, are influenced, undoubtedly, by the public discourse pro or against quotas from the European and international level.

One of the parliamentary initiative initiated by a women MP was in 2011, and proposed

A quota of minim 40% for the political parties (Sulfina Barbu, 2011). Unfortunately, after long debates and a lot of tergiversation it was definitely rejected.

In 2015, another proposal was made by a female MP, that enshrined an amendment for an equilibrated representative of women, at least 30%, but also this initiative was rejected. As argument, the MP stated that in Romania more than a half of the population is women and the female representation in Parliament is only of 11%. In the same time, the first aggregate index of the parliamentary activity and the scale of MPs was realized by Andreea Paul, MP, who came to the conclusion that, in the mandate starting in 2012 to present, the 65 women MPs are more active than their 509 male MPs (Andreea Paul, 2015: 32).

Another significant research was conducted by the Permanent Electoral Authority, during February-March 2014, called “The gender dimension of political life in Romania-interest, involvement, discrimination”, in which two main concepts were used – the level of interest in politics, as a crucial element in decision making in terms of participation in electoral process and the active involvement of women in the political life. There were interviewed 1.045 persons, only women, age over 18 years, coming from different groups in terms of level of education, residence, geographical area and income valued. The results showed that 71% of the total number of respondents believes that active involvement of a large number of women in political life would be a solution for significantly improving the political class in Romania.

Thus, is valid argument belonging to the normative field according to which the women representing more than 50% have the rights to an equal political representation.

The political representation of women responds to some needs and interests specific to women, and the researches and academic theories from the public sphere could lead to the increasing of the quality of the democracy.

As Krook stated, party quotas are the most common type of gender quota. They were first adopted in the early 1970s by a limited number of socialist and social democratic parties in Western Europe. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, they appeared in green parties, social democratic parties, and even some conservative parties more broadly across Western Europe, as well as in a diverse array of political parties in other regions around the world (Krook, 2009: 6).

In Romania, the main left party did not agree the introducing of gender quotas in the legislation, and yet, the Social Democrat Party, have permanently the best representation of women both at the legislative and governmental level and was the first party that adopted an internal parity gender quota system.

6. Conclusions and future research directions

Gender quotas have become an increasingly prominent solution in recent years to the under-representation of women in electoral politics. When it comes to motivations and strategies, normative questions play a central role in quota debates. Although a majority of these discussions revolve around competing definitions of equality and representation, the exact content of these norm-based arguments vary widely across country and party contexts (Krook, 2009:220).

Notions of equality and representation vary across countries, as well as across political parties. In recent years an increasing number of countries have adopted national legislative quotas, either by reforming the constitution or the electoral law, to require that political parties nominate a certain percentage of women among their candidates. The first country to official adopt and implement a national legislative quota was Argentina (Mona Lena Krook, 2003: 215). In Argentina, proposals to establish a quota law first appeared in the late 1980s. Only two countries (Belgium and France) have legally binding quotas (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA] & University of Stockholm 2007).

Although, based on the parliamentary data research, we discovered that the representative social role in the Romanian society is strongly related to women's perception in the public sphere as a family character rather than a political one.

To wrap up, women political representation are highly influence by the following factors: the way in which electoral law is constituted and the legitimized and valued resources in the political game. All these are supporting the way in which the political skill is constituted. Therefore, the ideological positions related to the gender equality between men and women, gender social representation maintains a "masculine" definition of the Romanian political sphere in post communism.

Therefore, it is a subject that implies deeper reflection on both construction and reconversion of the political elites in the post communist era. As already noted, relations between new and old institutions may be reinforcing or conflicting, and consequently, produce harmonizing or disjointed sequences of reform (Krook, 2009: 222).

The affirmative measures force the elimination of the prejudices and stereotypes, generally, of the discrimination, and could lead to the construction of some models for the underrepresented groups (Miroiu:2011).

Starting from the idea that political parties are the main source of recruitment of political élites, we conclude that an atomized party system can only produce dysfunctional élites, interested only in political survival and in promoting their own interests. The lack of ideological affiliations and values and the lack of democratic political culture make the Romanian political élites a product of the electoral system, a negative indicator of the functioning of a democracy. Given all these factors, it appears that Romanian democracy has its own functioning coordination and is in a process of change led, on one hand, by the conditions and social values from inside and, on the other hand, by the recommendations and conditions imposed by the European Union.

The Romanian political field is a male-dominated and the aim is to raise awareness of the under representation of women and questions of gender equality among the member associations. All individuals, men and women, have the right to equally take part in political life at all levels as voters, candidates, electoral officials and civil society representatives. Equal participation of women in politics and government is essential to build and sustain democracy.

The evolution of the democratic system depends on creating and improving its mechanisms for the inclusion of all citizens.

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